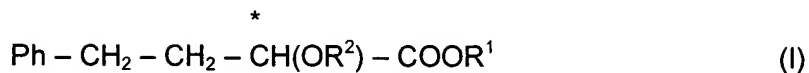


CLAIMS

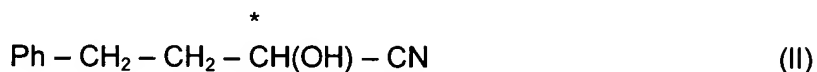
1. A process for the stereospecific preparation of an ester of formula (I):



wherein R^1 is C_{1-6} alkyl; and

R^2 is hydrogen, a protecting group or a leaving group

wherein the process comprises reacting a nitrile of formula (II):



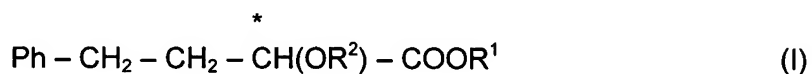
with a solution of an inorganic acid in an alcohol; and

wherein * signifies the (R) stereoisomer;

and optional conversion of a compound of formula (I), wherein R^2 is H, to the compound of formula (I).

2. The process of claim 1 wherein R^1 is ethyl.
3. The process of claim 1, wherein the acid is hydrogen chloride.
4. The process of claim 1, wherein the alcohol is ethanol.
5. The process of claim 1, wherein the reaction is carried out under substantially anhydrous conditions.
6. The process of claim 1, wherein the acid/alcohol solution comprises greater than 7% w/v of the acid, based on the volume of the solution.
7. The process of claim 1, wherein the reaction is carried out at the reflux temperature of the alcohol.

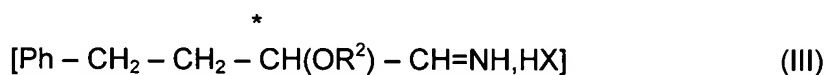
8. The process of claim 1, wherein the reaction is carried out at 70-85°C and goes to completion in the range of from 12 to 20 hours.
9. The process of claim 1, wherein the ratio of nitrile of formula (II); acid/alcohol solution is in the range of from 1:6 to 1:10, by volume.
10. The process of claim 9, wherein the ratio of nitrile of formula (II); acid/alcohol solution is in about 1:8, by volume.
11. A process for the stereospecific preparation of an ester of formula (I):



wherein R¹ is C₁₋₆ alkyl; and

R² is hydrogen, a protecting group or a leaving group

which process comprises reaction of an imine of formula (III):



wherein R² is as defined in formula (II); and X is an anion of an inorganic acid, , with an alcohol of formula R¹OH, wherein R¹ is C₁₋₆ alkyl.

12. The process of claim 11, wherein R¹ is ethyl.
13. The process of claim 11, wherein X is a halide.
14. The process of claim 13, wherein X is chlorine.
14. The process of claim 11, wherein the reaction is carried out under substantially anhydrous conditions.

15. The ester of formula (I), comprising at least 97% of the (R) isomer, wherein the ester is prepared by the process of claim 1.
16. The ester of formula (I), comprising at least 97% of the (R) isomer, wherein the ester is prepared by the process of claim 11.